

LES MISSIONS DES OBLATS DE MARIE - VOL. 80<sup>e</sup> - N.° 282 - MARS-JUIN 1953

# MISSIONS

DE

LA CONGREGATION

DES

## Missionnaires Oblats

DE

MARIE IMMACULÉE

80<sup>ÈME</sup> TOME (1953)

N. 282 - Mars-Juin, 1953



ROME (629)

MAISON GÉNÉRALE O. M. I.

290, Via Aurelia, 290

1953

**REPORT**  
**OF THE VICARIATE OF PRINCE RUPERT**  
**(British Columbia), Canada.**  
**(1953)**

**Area**

This Vicariate comprises an area of 134,000 square miles in northern British Columbia between the 53rd and 58th degrees of latitude with the exception of the districts of Telegraph Creek and Atlin.

**Population.**

Many people think of northern British Columbia as a wilderness. It must be conceded that there is something in this view; mountain and forest, lake and river so predominate that to the casual stranger in the Interior, a town or a village comes as almost a surprise. Yet this is gradually becoming less and less true for as they say here « the country is opening up ». The population has increased rather considerably in the past six years but the Catholic proportion is not large, perhaps 15 %. Exact population figures are not easy to obtain but one feels safe in saying that the Catholic body has increased from a little less than 8,000 to nearly 11,000. In 1947, the Indians formed half of the total Catholic number; but today the population may be less than 40 %.

**Reasons For Increased Population.**

The chief reason why the population has increased is the greater use being made of natural resources. Two industrial enterprises are worth mentioning:

1. Near Prince Rupert, the Columbia Cellu-

lose Company opened a plant in 1951 to manufacture a sulphide paper. This plant built at a cost of \$ 40,000,000, gives employment to five hundred persons and has provided the Prince Rupert District with its first steady payroll. This has naturally led to an increased number of permanent workers, a fair sprinkling of whom are Catholics.

2. One hundred miles south of Prince Rupert, a project is being developed that is one of the most ambitious undertakings ever attempted on this continent. Basically it involves the development of a new lake — the largest lake in British Columbia — which will be the source of a huge volume of power. The Aluminum Company of Canada is spending \$ 500,000,000 to make use of this new source of electrical power and will open next year the first unit of a huge smelter for the manufacture of aluminum ingots. The smelter will be erected at a place called Kitimat and it is forecast that by 1956 there will be seven thousand people living in this new city of Kitimat; and by 1962, so we are being told, Kitimat will be the third largest city in British Columbia with a population of over forty thousand. That is in the future. But even now, the effects of this project are being felt, for as many as five thousand men are engaged in the various activities connected with creating the lake, building a smelter, and founding a new city.

### **Personnel.**

In this Vicariate there are, at present writing, thirty-five Priests, of whom twenty-nine are Oblate Fathers; four Lay Brothers, of whom two are Oblates. Our Oblate personnel has undergone great changes in the past six years, for since 1947 we have received eighteen new missionaries. Thirteen of these came to us from Ireland, four from St. Peter's Province, and one from the Province of Texas. They are engaged in missionary work among whites and In-

dians alike and to a man, they seem to be devoted to their rude missionary labours.

Unfortunately, the number of Priests is not large enough. Two drawbacks flow from this fact: some of our Fathers are condemned to lonely isolation, particularly in the winter months and we wish that they might have a companion: our missionary work suffers greatly in some localities and we are obliged to leave almost untended part of our scattered flock. There will be some undoubtedly tempted to calculate how many Catholics there are for each Priest in this Vicariate and decide that we are much better off than many other places. So to judge, is to be oblivious to the special characteristics of missionary life in northern Canada, which are isolation and loneliness. We are in urgent need of more Priests.

Another great need is for more Lay Brothers. Up to 1947 we had one; in 1953 we have two. Future historians of the Oblate Apostolate in Canada cannot help but ask themselves why, of the several Vicariates in Canada, that of Prince Rupert seems to have been forgotten when these able assistants to missionary Priests were given their assignments. Had we even a small increase in the number of our Brothers, we should probably be able to put an end to the undesirable necessity of having Fathers living alone. Then too, when one thinks of the daily manual work to be done in the missions and the new construction that must be undertaken-well, one cannot help casting envious glances at other more fortunate missionary Vicariates.

### **Progress.**

(a) *Material Progress*: A report of this kind would be incomplete did it not make mention of the fact that six new Churches have been built since 1947 (Fort St. James, Baldonel, Kelley Lake, Aleza Lake, Topley Landing, and Fraser Lake); two new

rectories at Giscome and McBride; two new schools (mirabile dictu) Prince George and Dawson Creek. Anyone familiar with the special difficulties of Catholic education in British Columbia will realize what sacrifices have been entailed in getting these new schools established. Let it be said to their glory, that the greatest sacrifices have been made by the Sisters of St. Ann at Prince George, and the Sisters of Charity of Providence at Dawson Creek.

(b) *Spiritual Progress*: It is alway very difficult to be definite about the spiritual progress of an individual; how much more difficult in the case of a scattered flock such as ours. The condition of our Catholic Indians is not what it was. In the recent past, they were rather isolated from contact with white people and this was all to the good on account of the religious indifference of the vast majority of the whites. Since the war, however, the situation has gradually changed: the Indians are becoming more and more mixed up with white people and their piety has suffered to some extent. However, they remain in general closely attached to their religion. Their greatest weakness is for alcohol and so far little success has been achieved in our efforts to cope with this great problem... the white Catholics range all the way from the very fervent to the extremely negligent and of course we have a large quota of fallen away. They belong to a great many different nationalities; some have been well instructed in their youth and for the most part kept up the practice of their religion; many others, however, know little or nothing about the faith and when these settle in isolated places where there is no resident Priest, it is easy to imagine what happens.

Thanks to the three white schools wich we now have nearly six hundred children are being educated by the Sisters and we hope that the white population in another generation will show the good effects of this early training. The fact that our missionaries

have been able to say Mass in the afternoon and in the evening since 1951, has been a great boom. The zeal of the Fathers in seeking out their lost sheep is praise worthy in the extreme.

### **Appreciation.**

As this report is being written by the Vicar Apostolic, it is fitting that tribute be paid to Most Reverend Father General and the members of his Council for the keen interest they have taken in the problems of this mission field. It is indeed a reason for wonder that, with so many plots of the Master's Vineyard to superintend, they find the time and the energy to be so personally interested as they have shown themselves to be during the past six years. When he has not been able to supply us with the needed personnel, Father General has been as disappointed as we ourselves have been.

The Vicariate of Prince Rupert forms part of St. Peter's Province and heartfelt thanks are here tendered to Father Provincial for his interest in the missions, his helpfulness at all times, and for valuable additions to our missionary staff.

When our need was greatest in 1947, the Anglo-Irish Province came to our rescue with three missionaries in that very year. All told there are at this writing, twelve Fathers from the Anglo-Irish Province in the Vicariate. We thank the former Provincial Father O'Shea for the great personal interest he took in our problems; we thank also the Association of Mary Immaculate and its zealous Director for invaluable assistance sent throughout the entire period covered by this report.

To the oldest Canadian Province — *La Province du Canada* — special thanks are due for the great assistance given to the Vicariate through the loan of Lay Brothers. On two occasions, brothers were sent by Father Stanislas La Rochelle, O.M.I., the present

Provincial, to assist in building a school at Prince George, and a church at Fort St. James.

### **Conclusion.**

The small band of missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate labouring for our Lord in northern British Columbia remains strongly attached to their religious family. While present-day conditions oblige many of them to live isolated from their brethren, they look forward to the day, when, through the addition of recruits from our Scholasticates, it will be possible for each and everyone to have a companion so that the Oblate life may be lived with greater fervour.

ANTHONY JORDAN, O.M.I.  
*Vic. Ap. and Vicar  
of Mission.*